

German Expulsions after World War II (Part II)

[John Wear](#)

The Organized German Expulsions

International public opinion was generally relieved by the announcement at Potsdam that the Allied governments were proposing to assume control of the expulsion process. However, many people were taken aback by the number of Germans proposed to be transferred in such a short period of time.

A *New York Times* editorial noted that the number of Germans who were to be removed from their homes in seven months was “roughly equal to the number of immigrants arriving in the United States during the last 40 years.”^[1] Transfers of this scale had never been attempted in human history.

Negotiations to determine when, how many, and to which destinations expellees would be removed were conducted among representatives of the Polish and Czechoslovak governments and the United States, the Soviet Union, France and Great Britain. A final agreement was approved on November 20, 1945 by the Allied Control Council (ACC), the occupying countries’ temporary governing body for Germany. The so-called ACC Agreement, a skeletal accord less than two pages in length, specified the approximate timing of the expulsions and the number of expellees to be sent to each zone of occupation. The ACC Agreement did not create any international machinery for carrying out the transfers or for supervising their execution. In truth, the ACC Agreement was an almost meaningless document.^[2]

A serious attempt to come to grips with the expulsion problem would be expected to include the appointment of an executive body to conduct and oversee the operation; a description of the means to be used; and the assignment of responsibility for making the necessary preparations for assembly, embarkation, reception and assimilation of the German expellees. The ACC Agreement contained none of these provisions. The primary purpose of the ACC Agreement was to reassure an increasingly anxious public that the Allies were finally addressing the expulsion problem, and to deflect further public and media criticism. In this regard, the ACC Agreement prevented Robert Murphy from generating an official U.S. protest over the means by which the Poles in particular had been clearing the Recovered Territories of their German population.^[3]

The ACC did set up an agency called the Combined Repatriation Executive (CRX) on October 1, 1945. The CRX was designed to impose order on the expulsion process, and it became the closest thing to an international apparatus to cope with the enormous transport challenges the expulsions would involve. The CRX ran into problems when it attempted to determine the start dates for the organized expulsions and the minimum welfare standards to be maintained throughout the operation. The interests of the expelling and receiving countries diverged in both respects, with the expelling countries desiring to both begin the expulsions as soon as possible and retain as much German expellee property as possible.

The organized expulsions rapidly degenerated into a race against time. The expelling governments sought to rid themselves of as many unwanted Germans as possible before the receiving countries called a halt to further transfers. Given the minimal resources dedicated to the expulsion operations, the breakneck pace at which they were conducted, and the expelling countries’ ambivalence over whether

the efficient removal of the expellees should in any way hamper their collective punishment, it could hardly have been expected that the expulsion process would be “orderly and humane.” [4]

Numerous journalists, military, and government leaders continued to report problems with the expulsion process. Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower telegraphed Washington, D.C. on October 18, 1945, to warn of the dangers of the German expulsions:

In Silesia, Polish administration and methods are causing a mass exodus westward of German inhabitants. Germans are being ordered out of their homes and to evacuate New Poland. Many unable to move are placed in camps on meager rations and under poor sanitary conditions. Death and disease rate in camps extremely high.

...Methods used by Poles definitely do not conform to Potsdam agreement...

Breslau death rate increased tenfold and death rate reported to be 75% of all births. Typhoid, typhus, dysentery, and diphtheria are spreading.

Total number potentially involved in westward movement to Russian zone of Germany from Poland and Czechoslovakia in range of 10 million...No coordinated measures yet taken to direct stream of refugees into specific regions or provide food and shelter.

...[There exists] serious danger of epidemic of such great proportion as to menace all Europe, including our troops, and to probability of mass starvation [on an] unprecedented scale. [5]

Eisenhower’s primary concern in sending this telegraph was probably the danger of epidemics in such great proportion as to menace all of Europe, including the Allied troops. Eisenhower had repeatedly stated that he hated the Germans and wanted to be extremely hard on them after the war. [6]

Donald Mackenzie, a *New York Daily News* correspondent, reported from Berlin:

In the windswept courtyard of the Stettiner Bahnhof, a cohort of German refugees, part of 12,000,000 to 19,000,000 dispossessed in East Prussia and Silesia, sat in groups under a driving rain and told the story of their miserable pilgrimage, during which more than 25% died by the roadside and the remainder were so starved they scarcely had strength to walk.

Filthy, emaciated, and carrying their few remaining possessions wrapped in bits of cloth they shrank away crouching when one approached them in the railway terminal, expecting to be beaten or robbed or worse. That is what they have become accustomed to expect.

A nurse from Stettin, a young, good-looking blond, told how her father had been stabbed to death by Russian soldiers who, after raping her mother and sister, tried to break into her own room. She escaped and hid in a haystack with four other women for four days....

On the train to Berlin she was pillaged once by Russian troops and twice by Poles...Women who resisted were shot dead, she said, and on one occasion she saw a guard take an infant by the legs and crush its skull against a post because the child cried while the guard was raping its mother.

An old peasant from Silesia said...victims were robbed of everything they had, even their shoes. Infants were robbed of their swaddling clothes so that they froze to death. All the healthy girls and women, even those 65 years of age were raped in the train and then robbed, the peasant said. [7]

Robert Greer, a Canadian lieutenant, wrote of his visit to Berlin in late 1945:

...In driving about [Berlin] on Sunday morning, we came to the Stettiner Bahnhof. It's a complete wreck of course, the great arched glassway broken and twisted. I went down to the ground level and looked. There were people. Sitting on bundles of clothes, crouched by handcarts and little wagons were people...they were all exhausted and starved and miserable. You'd see a child sitting on a roll of blankets, a girl of perhaps four or five, and her eyes would be only half open and her head would loll occasionally and her eyes blink slowly as though she were only half alive. Beside her, her mother apparently, a woman with her head on her outstretched arm in the most terrible picture of despair and exhaustion and collapse I've seen. You could see in the line of her body all the misery that was possible for her to feel...no home, no husband, no food, no place to go, no one to care, nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing but a piece of the floor of the Stettiner Bahnhof and a night of weary hunger. In another place, another woman, sitting with her head in her hands...my God, how often have I sat like that with my stomach sick within me and felt miserable and helpless and uncaring...yet always I had someone to help, or a bed to rest on and a meal to eat and a place to go. For her there was nothing. Even when you see it it's impossible to believe. What can you do when you have nothing? Where can you go, what can you do, when you have no strength left and hunger is a sickness in your belly? God it was terrible. [8]

Greer saw no men, only women and children. The people Greer described had survived the expulsions in their eastern homelands, where conditions were often even worse. They were wasted, half-dead people. [9]

Anne O'Hare McCormick, special correspondent to the *New York Times*, reported from Germany on February 4, 1946: "...it was also agreed at Potsdam that the forced migration should be carried out 'in a humane and orderly manner.' Actually, as everyone knows who has seen the awful sights at the reception centers in Berlin and Munich, the exodus takes place under nightmarish conditions, without any international supervision or any pretense of humane treatment. We share responsibility for horrors only comparable to Nazi cruelties..." [10]

On December 8, 1945, Bertrand Russell, writing in the *New Leader*, protested the German expulsions again:

It was agreed at Potsdam that these expulsions should take place "in a humane and orderly manner," but this provision has been flouted. At a moment's notice, women and children are herded into trains, with only one suitcase each, and they are usually robbed on the way of its contents. The journey to Berlin takes many days, during which no food is provided. Many are dead when they reach Berlin; children who die on the way are thrown out of the window. A member of the Friends' Ambulance Unit describes the Berlin station at which these trains arrive as "Belsen over again—carts taking the dead from the platform, etc." A large proportion of those ejected from their homes are not put into trains, but are left to make their way westward on foot. Exact statistics of the numbers thus expelled are not available, since only the Russians could provide them. Ernest Bevin's estimate is 9,000,000. According to a British office now in Berlin, populations are dying, and Berlin hospitals "make the sights of the concentration camps appear normal." [11]

In Czechoslovakia and Poland, foreign diplomats and media representatives were invited to witness the staged conditions of the initial organized expulsions. The Czechoslovak government was most successful in arranging a suitably reassuring spectacle for the observers. The foreign dignitaries who were present

at the initial organized expulsion on January 25, 1946 marveled at the effort Czechoslovak authorities took to ensure the safe passage of the German expellees. A week's ration of food was immediately issued to each expellee, with an additional three days' supply of food held in reserve. All passengers were first medically examined by a medical doctor, and the train included a "Red Cross" compartment staffed by German nurses. The Czech commandant overseeing the proceedings confirmed that none of the expellees' possessions had been confiscated, and those who arrived lacking adequate clothing were provided with what they needed by the Czechoslovaks themselves. A British journalist who witnessed another staged Czechoslovak transport found the scene "more like the end of a village garden-party than part of a great transfer of population."[\[12\]](#)

The reality of the organized expulsions from Czechoslovakia was not nearly as favorable as the staged transports indicated. A very large number of German expellees were transported while suffering from infectious diseases contracted in the camps. The Red Army repeatedly complained that the trains from Czechoslovakia were consistently dispatched with insufficient food rations for the journey. The trains were often supplied with unusable, incompatible, or obsolete wagons, making it impossible to transport expellees' baggage. Official reports spoke of systematic pillage of expellees by both military and civilian personnel, and local authorities continued unauthorized expulsions under the guise of "voluntary transfers." Productive individuals were also held in Czechoslovakia in violation of the requirement that families not be separated. The number of able-bodied and skilled workers included in the expulsions was extremely low.[\[13\]](#)

Poland was not nearly as successful in convincing foreign observers that her organized expulsions were orderly and humane. Expulsions from the Recovered Territories in Poland to the British Zone of Germany had been given the designation of "Operation Swallow." A correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*, who met a transport from Poland on March 3, 1946, found that 250 of the expellees were so seriously ill as to require immediate hospitalization; two of the expellees were dead on arrival. The correspondent stated, "In later transports the figures have been higher."

A considerable portion of the expellees from Poland had eaten no food for up to a week. The women bore marks of systematic maltreatment over a long period, with the scars of physical and sexual abuse much in evidence. A British medical officer who examined the German expellees determined that "most of the women had been violated, among them a girl of 10 and another of 16."[\[14\]](#)

Reports of systematic maltreatment of the German expellees from Poland began to flood in from Allied reception centers. Of 4,100 expellees on three Swallow trains, 524 were admitted directly to the hospital. The camp commandant reported that most of the women in these transports were multiple rape victims, as were some of the children.

A British army colonel who met a Polish expellee train in April 1946 reported that nearly all the passengers had been "severely ill-treated," exhibiting "deep scars in the skull bone, fingers crippled by ill-treatment, fractures of the ribs which were more or less healed, and partly large [sic] bloodshot spots on their backs and their legs. The latter was also seen with women." The British also reported that the Polish authorities consistently failed to provide rations for the expellees during their journey or for the day of their arrival in Germany, as their agreement with CRX obligated them to do.[\[15\]](#)

After only two months of the Polish organized expulsions, the operation had become so chaotic that officials in the reception areas had begun to press for its immediate suspension. Officials in London

noted the deplorable condition in which the expellees were arriving was an observable fact with which British authorities in the reception areas were struggling to cope. However, British representatives on CRX did not seek to restrict the intake of expellees to a level that could be accommodated, since such a policy would have prolonged the transfer operation into the indefinite future. Instead, CRX officials agreed to a Polish request at the end of April 1946 to increase the daily rate of transfers from 5,000 to 8,000. This decision eliminated the prospect of imposing a degree of control over the conditions under which the expulsions took place. The result was a perpetual crisis atmosphere, with increased suffering and higher mortality among the German expellees from the Recovered Territories. [\[16\]](#)

The problem of overcrowding of the camps, the trains, and the reception areas was prevalent throughout Operation Swallow's year-long existence. The expulsions from Poland hardly ever followed an orderly pattern. Soviet and Polish employers were often reluctant to part with their cheap or free German labor, and would often hide their German workers so that they would not be expelled according to plan. A more-common problem was Germans who showed up at assembly camps ahead of schedule. Sometimes these Germans were forced to the camps by local Polish authorities or militia units who took matters into their own hands and cleared their districts of Germans. Other Germans, lacking ration cards or means of support, showed up at assembly camps as their only alternative to starvation. Just as often, though, Germans who had already resigned themselves to leaving Poland decided that the sooner they arrived in postwar Germany the better. [\[17\]](#)

The assembly camps themselves were no safe haven for the German expellees. The British ambassador who visited an assembly camp at Szczecin in October 1946 stated, "Since I have been promoted to Ambassador I have smelt many nasty smells, but nothing to equal the immense and over-powering stench of this camp." The ambassador advised the camp commandant that this assembly camp at Szczecin should be closed down, fumigated, and repaired. [\[18\]](#)

The assembly camps became centers of hunger and disease, and the resulting mortality was on a significant scale. During the month of January 1947 alone, 52 inmates at the Gumieńce Camp in Szczecin died "mainly through undernourishment but [in] one or two cases...also through frost-bite." Ninety-five inmates died of disease in one month at the Dantesque facility at Świdwin, which lacked water, heat, bedding, intact roofs and medical supplies. Nearly 3,500 cases of illness were reported in this camp during the same month. [\[19\]](#)

Expulsions of Germans from Hungary, Romania and Yugoslavia

Since Hungary was an ex-enemy state, the ACC issued directives concerning expulsions rather than engaging in discussions with the interim Budapest government. The first expulsion of Germans from Hungary, the so-called Swabians, was ordered to be made on December 15, 1945 to the American Zone. Contrary to the government's plans, the first group of deportees from Hungary had in some cases been given no more than 10 minutes' notice of their removal. The system of medical screening prior to departure broke down and was abandoned, and the train took nearly three days to cover the 160 miles between Budapest and its initial stop in Vienna. Since no food had been provided for the journey, the passengers were seriously affected by hunger. Taking all the various breaches into account, inspectors who met the train in the U.S. Zone concluded that the transport had taken place under inhumane conditions. [\[20\]](#)

The expulsion operations from Hungary continued in a disorganized and inhumane manner. The promised transit camps were never built; instead, villages were designated as assembly areas from which expellees could be sent. Trains were routinely dispatched without food for the passengers, and no notice of any kind was provided before the appearance of many transports in the U.S. Zone. Only 15 trains, many of which were in deplorable condition, were available for the operation. Gen. Clay said that “a majority of Swabians arriving in the U.S. Zone are for all intents and purposes destitute and penniless.” In a March 1990 resolution, the Hungarian Parliament admitted that the expulsion of the Swabians from Hungary was an “unjust action.” [\[21\]](#)

For the two smallest expelling countries, Romania and Yugoslavia, all removals of Germans were by definition “wild expulsions” since the Allies never invited these nations to expel their ethnic Germans into occupied Germany or Austria. Uniquely, the Romanian government never formally demanded expulsion nor issued an expulsion decree against its German minority. In fact, the Romanian government in January 1945 formally protested the first move by the Soviet military authorities to expel Romania’s ethnic Germans.

However, the Soviet military required the Romanian government to round up all ethnic German males between the ages of 18 and 45, and females between 18 and 30, for transportation to the Soviet Union as slave laborers. In the predawn hours of January 11, 1945, combined Soviet and Romanian patrols began roundups requiring deportees to be ready within 15 minutes with sufficient food and clothing for 10 days. Up to 75,000 Germans were removed from Romania by these means. Other Germans were taken into internment camps to facilitate the redistribution of their property. [\[22\]](#)

After the Soviets took control of the Romanian government in March 1945, a pair of decrees forfeited ethnic Germans’ real property to the state and stripped most ethnic Germans of their Romanian citizenship. The new Romanian government denied the Red Cross the right to extend charitable assistance to the Germans “on the ground that these people had lost Romanian nationality.” Romania’s Germans were officially classified as illegal immigrants, and ethnic Romanians began taking over the Germans’ former homes.

The ICRC reported that returning German deportees “generally camp out in the open air or in cellars and sometimes they have nothing to eat but what they can grow in the fields.” The ICRC also reported that the Germans who had escaped deportation “have literally been put out into the street....Usually, their houses were given to Gypsies who, often, employ the former owners as domestic servants.” Deprived of the means of existence, the Germans were in the position of having been constructively expelled from Romania. By August 1945, substantial numbers of Germans from Romania had made their way to Germany and Austria, most having arrived in a very poor state of health. [\[23\]](#)

Romania was the first expelling country to intern her German minority. By June 1946, so many Germans had been expelled that Romania reported to the Red Cross that all of Romania’s internment camps had been closed. The expulsion of the Germans had an adverse effect on Romania’s agricultural production. An Allied officer who toured the Romanian countryside where the Germans had been deported found “large areas of valuable agricultural land...just lying idle. Glasshouses producing tomatoes, lettuces and other crops were likewise in a state of abandonment and in some cases would need quite a fair amount of capital to renew and repair the damages caused by the winter frosts.”

A Reuters journalist who interviewed the native Romanians of the region in 1946 reported: “[A]ll said that they sympathized with the Saxons [Germans] and were sorry that they had their land property confiscated under agrarian reform, since this land had been given to gypsies to purchase support for the Government, and the gypsies were very lazy and left the land uncultivated.” [24]

The Germans in Yugoslavia were subject to exceptionally brutal treatment and expulsions. They were dispossessed of all their property by law. The internment camps erected for Germans by the Tito government in Yugoslavia were decidedly not mere assembly points for group expulsion; rather, they were consciously and officially recognized as extermination centers for many thousands of ethnic Germans. There was little or no food or medical care in the internment camps, and internees were left to starve to death or perish from rampant disease. The primary purpose of these internment camps appears to have been to inflict misery and death on as many ethnic Germans as possible. [25]

The Tito regime in November 1944 issued an edict that provided for the internment of all Yugoslav Germans except those who had played an active part in the struggle against Nazi occupation. The internment camps in Yugoslavia for Germans are widely considered to be the worst of all the expelling nations. The British Embassy in Belgrade, which secured the release of a Canadian woman with dual nationality in the summer of 1946, reported that her food ration at the Riđica Labor Camp “consisted of watery soup, and 200 grammes of maize bread, of so rock-like a consistency that it had to be soaked in water to be edible....At the end of January, [she] was transferred to the internment camp at Kruševlje, where work was not compulsory and where consequently the food consisted of two wooden spoonfuls of maize porridge a day and nothing else. In this camp there was a mortality rate, especially among children, as high as 200 a day.” The embassy noted that this account was consistent with other reports it had received from various sources concerning the Yugoslav internment camps for Germans. [26]

In a dispatch that was circulated to Attlee’s cabinet, the British Embassy in Belgrade reported in 1946 that “conditions in which Germans in Yugoslavia exist seem well down to Dachau standards.” The embassy staff added that there was little to be lost by placing these facts before the public “as it will hardly be possible for the position of those that are left in camps to deteriorate thereby.” The British Embassy further stated that the “indiscriminate annihilation and starvation” of the Yugoslav *Volksdeutsche* “must surely be considered an offence to humanity” and warned that “if they have to undergo another winter here, very few will be left.” [27]

Yugoslavia had to dissolve several camps—notably Bački Jarak, Sekić, and Filipovo—because their mortality rates were so high as to render them no longer viable. The Yugoslav government took initial steps to wind down its internment operations early in 1947. In the process, the Yugoslav government began forcing its remaining German inmates to pay the Yugoslav government money to obtain their release from the camps.

According to British intelligence officers, some German inmates bought their way out of Yugoslav camps by using the services of human-trafficking networks which would pay off the camp authorities. Other German inmates paid the higher price of 1,000 dinars per person to the camp staff, who would conduct groups of about 60 inmates at night to the border. In the summer of 1947, these operations caused the number of Yugoslav Germans illegally crossing into Austria via Hungary to more than double. Rudolfsgnad, the last remaining camp for ethnic Germans in Yugoslavia, closed in March 1948, although many former inmates still had to perform slave labor in state “enterprises” or farms. [28]

The expulsion of Yugoslavia's ethnic Germans had a long-term adverse effect on Yugoslavia's economy. Tito's vice premier, Edvard Kardelj, later observed to Milovan Djilas that in expelling its ethnic Germans, Yugoslavia had deprived itself of "our most-productive inhabitants." [29]

Fate of German Children

German children in Eastern Europe suffered major hardships and deprivations prior to and during the expulsion process. From August 1945, the Czech government allocated to German children under the age of six only half the allowance of milk, and less than half the allowance of barley allocated to their Czech counterparts. German children received no meat, eggs, jam, or fruit syrup at all, these being allocated entirely to children of the Czech majority.

One example of the prevailing mood in Czechoslovakia toward German children was expressed by the Prague newspaper *Mladá Fronta*, which ran a ferocious campaign against British proposals to provide a temporary haven for thousands of starving German children during the winter of 1945-1946. When an announcement was made that the scheme would not go ahead, the newspaper's headline read: "British Will Not Feed Little Hitlerites: Our Initiative Crowned with Success." [30]

In the Recovered Territories, food-ration cards were progressively withdrawn from the entire German population. Like their parents, German children found that they were entitled to no rations at all. The head of the Szczecin-Stołczyn Commissariat thus proudly reported that since the end of November 1945, even German children under the age of two had their milk allocation withdrawn from them.

Polish laws designed to protect German children were typically never enforced. For example, a directive issued in April 1945 by the Polish Ministry of Public Security specifying that nobody under the age of 13 was to be detained was never followed. More than two years later, the Polish Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare was complaining that the regulations against imprisoning children in camps continued to be "completely ignored." German children were illegally detained in Polish internment camps as late as August 1949. [31]

German children experienced the worst conditions in the detention centers. Přemysl Pitter, a social worker from Prague, quickly found as he visited the Czechoslovak detention centers that the overwhelming majority of those who needed his aid were ethnic Germans. At a makeshift internment camp in Prague, Pitter discovered at the end of July 1945 "a hell of which passers-by hadn't the faintest notion." More than a thousand Germans, the great majority women and children, were "crowded together in an indescribable tangle. As we brought emaciated and apathetic children out and laid them on the grass, I believed that few would survive. Our physician, Dr. E. Vogl, himself a Jew who had gone through the hell of Auschwitz and Mauthausen, almost wept when he saw these little bodies. 'And here we Czechs have done this in two and a half months!' he exclaimed." Red Cross officials found that the conditions at other Prague camps were no better. [32]

The youngest German children were most-vulnerable to the conditions in the detention centers. Their undeveloped immune systems and lack of physical reserves left them particularly vulnerable to starvation and its attendant diseases. A credible account by a female detainee at Potulice in Poland recorded that of 110 children born in the camp between the beginning of 1945 and her eventual expulsion in December 1946, only 11 children were still alive by the later date. A high rate of infant

mortality in the camps was also caused by numerous cases in which German children were denied medical care because of their ethnicity.

Investigations by the ICRC found high rates of infant mortality attributable to malnutrition to be widespread in Czechoslovakia. When the ICRC visited a detention center in Bratislava at the end of 1945, it found that every one of the emaciated infants and children was “suffering from hideous skin eruptions” and that conditions were “in general so desperate that it is difficult to find words” with which to comfort the detainees. A journalist from *Obzory*, who visited one of the Prague detention centers in the autumn of 1945, acknowledged that “mortality has increased to a horrifying degree” among the children. The journalist attributed the high mortality among the infants to the complete absence of infant formula and the fact that the majority of nursing mothers were too emaciated to breastfeed their newborns.[\[33\]](#)

Authorities generally did little to shield children from the harsher aspects of camp life. Germans in Czechoslovakia typically became forced laborers on their 14th birthday, with some districts requiring labor services of those aged 10 or above. At Mirošov in Czechoslovakia, the definition of “adult” for forced labor consisted of all inmates above six years of age. Children of 10 years of age and above were also routinely used as forced laborers in Yugoslavia. In September 1945, the ICRC complained that in the Czechoslovak camps the young male guards treated detainees with “the utmost cruelty,” with widespread beatings of children as well as adults. Many children were also subject to psychological abuse, and some children were compelled—as at Kruševlje in Yugoslavia—to witness their parents’ torture or execution at the hands of camp guards.[\[34\]](#)

The Western Allies did not intervene to help ethnic German children in Eastern Europe since they regarded all Germans as perpetrators of World War II. The policies of the Western Allies and the expelling nations were a violation of their subscription in 1926 to the International Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which stipulated that children were to “be the first to receive relief in times of distress” without taking into account “considerations of race, nationality or creed.”

German children were also denied aid from international relief agencies like UNRRA and the International Refugee Organization (IRO) as a matter of policy. Even the UN International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) maintained a discriminatory stance against German children, assigning priority to the children of “victims of aggression” in the provision of aid. The plight of children in the expelling countries was additionally worsened by the expropriation of German religious and charitable organizations, which caused German children in orphanages and facilities for handicapped children to lose their homes. In the long run, the only hope for most German children in the expelling countries was their expeditious removal to Germany.[\[35\]](#)

The Resettlement of Expelled Germans

The surviving expelled Germans continued to face unimaginable hardships and suffering in Germany. The devastation of Germany by total warfare had demolished its life-sustaining resources. Industrial production in the American Zone after the war had gradually risen until it reached a high of about 12% of the old normal. However, with a cut in food rations, the industrial production index had begun to decline again. On May 4, 1946, Brig. Gen. William H. Draper, Jr., the Allied Military Government director of economics, reported that industrial output in the American Zone was “far below that necessary to maintain the minimum standard of living.”[\[36\]](#)

By August 1945, the daily death rate in Berlin had risen from a prewar amount of 150 to 4,000, even though Berlin's population in August 1945 was significantly smaller than before the war. In the U.S. sector of Berlin, the infant-mortality rate for infants born in the summer of 1945 was 95%. Germany also faced an acute shortage of housing after the war. Even where houses existed, the inadequacy of water or drainage facilities in them was giving rise to the grave danger of epidemics. Because of the high proportion of sick, abused, or infirm expellees, the hospitals and asylums in Germany were full to overflowing. This was the environment into which the Allies proposed to transfer another 7 to 8 million people. [37]

By September 1945, 45 makeshift reception camps had been set up in Berlin, employing barracks, schools, and any other building not already being used for other purposes. The number of expellees seeking admission to these camps greatly exceeded the spaces available. Thousands of expellees never left the station at which they had arrived, while thousands more set up improvised tent villages in city parks or woods on the outskirts of Berlin. Many expellees died of hypothermia as the weather turned colder, and the sight of corpses of people who had spent their last night outdoors became a common spectacle during the first peacetime winter in Germany. By the end of 1945, 625 camps of various kinds with a total population of more than 480,000 had been established in eastern Germany. The number of camps in the Western zones of Germany ran into the thousands. [38]

Conditions in most of the expellee camps were extremely grim. The records of the occupying authorities and humanitarian bodies are replete with descriptions of overcrowded, unheated, disease-ridden, and even roofless facilities in which expellees languished for months or years. Unemployment was also a problem for the expellees. When German expellees could find work at all, it tended to be poorly paid if not positively exploitative.

As 1946 began drawing to a close, Germany continued to feel the strain of the so-called organized expulsions. Col. Ralph Thickers, a senior officer administering Operation Swallow, warned: "At present, we tend to regard occupied Germany as a waste-paper basket with a limitless capacity for the unwanted waste of the world. We are not convinced that this attitude is correct, either economically or politically." [39]

The Western democracies generally disavowed any responsibility for the suffering that resulted from the German expulsions, which they claimed was entirely the concern of the expelling states or of the Germans themselves. Some officers attached to the Allied Military Government in Germany even stated that mass deaths among expellees were a matter of no great significance compared to the overriding objective of not offending the Soviet Union. For example, Goronwy Rees stated on November 2, 1945:

It is inevitable that millions of Germans must die in the coming winter. It is inevitable that millions of the nomads who wander aimlessly in all directions across Germany should find no resting place but the grave.... These facts could only be altered, if at all, by a universal effort of philanthropy which would reverse the result of the war....

The real danger of Germany at the moment is not that millions of Germans must starve, freeze and die during the winter; it is that out of their misery the Germans should create an opportunity for destroying the unity of the Allies who defeated them. [40]

While not in the majority, views like these were far from unusual.

Although most of the German expellees were Catholic, the Vatican conspicuously refrained from protesting their mass expulsion. While individual priests and bishops in the United States and central Europe vigorously condemned mass expulsions as inconsistent with the laws of God, the pope never publicly did so. Nor did the governing body of any other Christian denomination protest the mass deportations of ethnic Germans. The Christian churches were only prepared to give small-scale assistance to the expellees out of existing funds. To mount a larger appeal on behalf of the expelled Germans would have required at least a public announcement on their behalf, and this was something none of the Christian churches was prepared to do. [\[41\]](#)

Those individuals and nongovernmental organizations that sought to mitigate the ill effects of the German expulsions could make little headway. The Allies insisted that the German expellees be excluded from any form of international protection or assistance. As a result, humanitarian organizations like the Red Cross were frequently prevented from extending even minimal assistance to the German expellees.

In addition to denying food, clothing and shelter to the German expellees, Allied policy prevented any organization from representing the expellees to the expelling states or the Allied governments in Germany. Nor was there any agency or organization to which German expellees subject to inhumane treatment could appeal. Because of this Allied policy, advocates for the expellees could do little more than attempt to raise public awareness. While advocates for the expellees enjoyed limited success in this regard, it was never enough to make a difference in the way in which the expulsions were conducted. None of the expelling or receiving governments was ever compelled by the pressure of public opinion to abandon or modify a policy on which they had previously decided. [\[42\]](#)

Freda Utley described the treatment of the German expellees in Germany:

Many of the old, the young, and the sick died of hunger or cold or exposure on the long march into what remained of Germany, or perished of hunger and thirst and disease in the crowded cattle cars in which some of the refugees were transported. Those who survived the journey were thrust upon the slender resources of starving occupied Germany. No one of German race was allowed any help by the United Nations. The displaced-persons camps were closed to them and first the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and then the International Refugee Organization (IRO) was forbidden to succor them. The new untouchables were thrown into Germany to die, or survive as paupers in the miserable accommodations which the bombed-out cities of Germany could provide for those even more wretched than their original inhabitants.

How many were killed or died will never be known. Out of a total of 12 to 13 million people who had committed the crime of belonging to the German race, 4 or 5 million are unaccounted for. But no one knows how many are dead and how many are slave laborers....

The estimate of the number of German expellees, or Flüchtlinge as the Germans call them, in Rump Germany is now 8 or 9 million. The International Refugee Organization (IRO) takes no account of them, and was expressly forbidden by act of Congress to give them any aid. It is obviously impossible for densely overcrowded West Germany to provide for them. A few have been absorbed into industry or are working on German farms, but for the most part they are living in subhuman conditions without hope of acquiring homes or jobs. [\[43\]](#)

American aid in the form of the Marshall Plan eventually helped to improve conditions in Germany. The famous “economic miracle” achieved two important goals: rapid economic recovery and the integration of millions of expellees into the German economy. The expellees had many years of pain behind them; now they could rebuild their lives and have a chance to begin anew. Unfortunately, even in 1949 many of the German expellees still had to live in group housing.[\[44\]](#)

Freda Utey wrote of the discrimination expellees faced in obtaining adequate housing:

Although the number of displaced persons in Germany is continually diminishing and many of the camps are half empty, the Germans are not allowed either to regain possession of the many houses, barracks, and other buildings occupied by the DP's, or to place their own refugees in them. Exact information is not available since the German authorities are not allowed to enter the DP camps but, according to the estimate of the Bavarian Minister for Refugees, between 24,000 and 28,000 beds are now unoccupied. While this accommodation is wasted the German refugees are crowded into unsanitary huts and other accommodation unprovided with the most elementary comforts and decencies, and frequently have to sleep on the floor....

In the Dachau camp near Munich I found 50 or more people—men, women and children—to each wooden hut 26 x 65 feet in size. There were no partitions, but the inmates were using some of their precious blankets to screen off their cubicles. The huts were cold and damp. It was raining and one woman with a little girl suffering from a bad cold showed me the wall behind their bed where the rain seeped through.

Four hundred people at Dachau shared one washroom and one outdoor latrine and there was no hot water. No one had any linen or sheets, and some had neither shoes nor overcoats.[\[45\]](#)

One positive result of the expulsions is that within an incredibly few years, the German expellees had become effectively integrated into the larger society in both West and East Germany. Instead of becoming terrorists in order to force the return of their homelands, the expellees preferred to take the path of peace and reconstruction. They renounced revenge and retaliation and made a decisive contribution to the post-war recovery of Europe by means of hard work and sacrifice. It should be noted that the expellees' public expression against revenge did not merely stem from a condition of weakness. It has been maintained ever since, and remains as Germany has become a respected political and economic power.[\[46\]](#)

The hard work and sacrifice of the German expellees was duplicated by Germans already living in Germany. With an incredible will and energy, Germans set out to rebuild their country. Admiring the hard work of German women, one American exclaimed: “Did you ever see anything like it! Aren't those German women wonderful?” Another American said: “I used to think that it was only in China you could see women working like that; I never imagined white people could do it. I admire their guts.”[\[47\]](#)

The fact that the German expellees quickly integrated into German society should not be viewed as a kind of retrospective vindication of Allied policy. The costs of the expulsions were all too apparent. Many hundreds of thousands of German expellees, most of whom were women and children, had lost their lives. Millions more of the expellees were impoverished, without the assets they had lost in the expelling countries now enriching those who had taken possession of them. The economies of entire regions were disrupted, and the surviving expellees suffered tremendous hardships both during and after the

expulsions. Tens of thousands of German women who had been repeatedly raped had to bear the physical and psychological scars for their entire life. The legacy of bitterness, recrimination, and mutual distrust between Germany and her neighbors from the expulsions still lingers to this day. [\[48\]](#)

Closing Thoughts on Expulsions of Germans

Since the German expulsions were not given adequate press coverage, most people in the United States and Great Britain did not know there were any expulsions at all. However, it was undoubtedly Anglo-American official adherence to the principle of population transfers that made the catastrophe of the German expulsions possible. The Allies had knowingly pursued a policy that would cause great suffering to the expellees, so as to generate an “educational” effect upon the defeated German population. Late in 1947, the ACC asked U.S. officials who had administered the transfers how these transfers might be better managed in the future. The U.S. officials stated that on the basis of their experience with mass expulsions:

We recommend that the Control Council declare its opposition to all future compulsory population transfers, particularly the forcible removal of persons from places which have been their homes for generations, and that the Control Council refuse, in the future, to accept into Germany any persons so transferred, excepting only repatriated German prisoners of war and persons who were formerly domiciled in Germany.

In formulating this recommendation...we have considered the moral and humanitarian aspect of the injustices done to masses of people when an element of a population is forcibly uprooted from long-established homes, has its property expropriated without redress, and is superimposed upon another population already suffering from hunger, insufficient shelter, lack of productive employment and want of social, medical and educational institutions. We have considered that any course of action other than that recommended above would be to invite just condemnation on grounds of economic, social and religious injustices to the persons being transferred, to the present population of Germany and to the populations of nations surrounding Germany. [\[49\]](#)

Schweitzer also expressed strong opposition to the expulsions of Germans. Upon receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo on November 4, 1954, he made an appeal to the conscience of mankind to repudiate the crime of mass expulsions:

The most grievous violation of the right based on historical evolution and of any human right in general is to deprive populations of their right to occupy the country where they live by compelling them to settle elsewhere. The fact that the victorious powers decided at the end of World War II to impose this fate on hundreds of thousands of human beings and, what is more, in a most cruel manner, shows how little they were aware of the challenge facing them, namely, to reestablish prosperity and, as far as possible, the rule of law. [\[50\]](#)

The fate of the German expellees has been ignored in most universities and high schools. The extreme hardships and suffering the expellees experienced have been pushed aside, if not totally forgotten. People have thus been deprived of an important history lesson: mass expulsions are almost invariably unjust and inhumane. American historian R. M. Douglas writes:

The most important lesson of the expulsion of the Germans, then, is that if these operations cannot be carried out under circumstances in which brutality, injustice, and needless suffering are inevitable, they

cannot be carried out at all. A firm appreciation of this truth, and a determination to be guided by it at all times and in every situation, however enticing the alternative may momentarily seem, is the most appropriate memorial that can be erected to this tragic, unnecessary, and, we must resolve, never to be repeated episode in Europe's and the world's recent history. [\[51\]](#)

Notes

[\[1\]](#) *New York Times*, Dec. 16, 1945.

[\[2\]](#) Douglas, R. M., *Orderly and Humane: The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2012, pp. 124-125.

[\[3\]](#) *Ibid.*, pp. 125-127.

[\[4\]](#) *Ibid.*, pp. 159-161.

[\[5\]](#) De Zayas, Alfred-Maurice, *A Terrible Revenge: The Ethnic Cleansing of the East European Germans*, 2nd edition, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p. 115.

[\[6\]](#) Bacque, James, *Crimes and Mercies: The Fate of German Civilians Under Allied Occupation, 1944-1950*, 2nd edition, Vancouver, British Columbia: Talonbooks, 2007, pp. 25-26.

[\[7\]](#) Congressional Record, Dec. 4, 1945, p. 11554, and *New York Daily News*, Oct. 8, 1945.

[\[8\]](#) Bacque, James, *Crimes and Mercies: The Fate of German Civilians Under Allied Occupation, 1944-1950*, 2nd edition, Vancouver, British Columbia: Talonbooks, 2007, pp. 94-95.

[\[9\]](#) *Ibid.*, p. 95.

[\[10\]](#) *New York Times*, Monday, Feb. 4, 1946, "Abroad: As UNO Prepares to Settle in this Neighborhood."

[\[11\]](#) De Zayas, Alfred-Maurice, *Nemesis at Potsdam: The Anglo-Americans and the Expulsion of the Germans*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977, p. 109.

[\[12\]](#) Douglas, R. M., *Orderly and Humane: The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2012, pp. 166-167.

[\[13\]](#) *Ibid.*, pp. 188-189.

[\[14\]](#) *Ibid.*, pp. 167-168.

[\[15\]](#) *Ibid.*, pp. 168-169.

[\[16\]](#) *Ibid.*, pp. 171, 174.

[\[17\]](#) *Ibid.*, pp. 174-176.

[\[18\]](#) *Ibid.*, pp. 178-179.

[\[19\]](#) *Ibid.*, p. 179.

- [20] *Ibid.*, pp. 166-167.
- [21] *Ibid.*, pp. 210-211, 356.
- [22] *Ibid.*, pp. 110-112.
- [23] *Ibid.*, pp. 112-113.
- [24] *Ibid.*, pp. 153, 278-279.
- [25] De Zayas, Alfred-Maurice, *A Terrible Revenge: The Ethnic Cleansing of the East European Germans*, 2nd edition, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, pp. 99-100.
- [26] Douglas, R. M., *Orderly and Humane: The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2012, pp. 136, 145.
- [27] *Ibid.*, p. 151.
- [28] *Ibid.*, pp. 153-154.
- [29] Djilas, Milovan, *Wartime*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977, p. 423.
- [30] Douglas, R. M., *Orderly and Humane: The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2012, pp. 233-234.
- [31] *Ibid.*, pp. 234, 236.
- [32] *Ibid.*, pp. 234-235.
- [33] *Ibid.*, pp. 234, 238-239.
- [34] *Ibid.*, pp. 234, 236-238.
- [35] *Ibid.*, pp. 240-241, 244.
- [36] Keeling, Ralph Franklin, *Gruesome Harvest: The Allies' Postwar War against the German People*, Torrance, Cal.: Institute for Historical Review, 1992, p. 84.
- [37] Douglas, R. M., *Orderly and Humane: The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2012, pp. 198, 303.
- [38] *Ibid.*, pp. 303-304, 309.
- [39] *Ibid.*, pp. 185, 192, 310-312.
- [40] *Ibid.*, pp. 286-287.
- [41] *Ibid.*, p. 297.
- [42] *Ibid.*, p. 286.
- [43] Utley, Freda, *The High Cost of Vengeance*, Chicago: Regnery, 1949, pp. 202-203.
- [44] De Zayas, Alfred-Maurice, *A Terrible Revenge: The Ethnic Cleansing of the East European Germans*, 2nd edition, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p. 130.

[45] Utley, Freda, *The High Cost of Vengeance*, Chicago: Regnery, 1949, pp. 203-204.

[46] De Zayas, Alfred-Maurice, *A Terrible Revenge: The Ethnic Cleansing of the East European Germans*, 2nd edition, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, pp. 135-137.

[47] Utley, Freda, *The High Cost of Vengeance*, Chicago: Regnery, 1949, p. 37.

[48] Douglas, R. M., *Orderly and Humane: The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2012, pp. 302, 364.

[49] *Ibid.*, p. 363.

[50] De Zayas, Alfred-Maurice, *A Terrible Revenge: The Ethnic Cleansing of the East European Germans*, 2nd edition, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p. 149.

[51] Douglas, R. M., *Orderly and Humane: The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2012, p. 374.

Author(s):	John Wear
Title:	German Expulsions after World War II (Part II)
Sources:	
Dates:	published: 2019-08-06, first posted: 2019-08-06 22:52:50

<http://inconvenienthistory.com/11/3/6820>